

Marriage 101—A Beginner's Guide to Marriage

Being in love is the greatest feeling in the world. When you decide to nurture your love for years to come and celebrate with family and friends along the way, then things can get complicated. The new changes will create joy, as well as a healthy amount of anxiety and apprehension. Don't let those feelings deter you from doing what you feel is right in your heart, but be sure you know what you're getting into.

If you are considering getting married, or are just beginning your own marriage journey, here is your guide to help you to create a successful and prosperous marriage.

01 of 04

Before You Set a Wedding Date

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Before you tie the knot, it is helpful to think about what marriage means and how it will affect your life.

- Know **why** you are getting married. If your motives are unrealistic, you may find yourself having unfulfilled expectations. There are many **right and wrong reasons to get married**.
- Make sure you are **really ready for marriage** by taking an **honest self-inventory**. Are you financially independent? Are you over your past relationships? Have you been able to resolve conflicts with your current partner? Have you gotten positive feedback about this relationship from loved ones? Do your long-term goals match?
- Accept that living together and being married are different. Marriage is more than sharing a home and having sex. You should look into **cohabitation facts and stats to make sure you are making the best choice for you and your future spouse**
- Recognize that many **myths of marriage** can tear your marriage apart.
- Deal with **realities and expectations** to keep your marriage strong.
- Talk with one another about important issues before you walk down the aisle.
- **Premarital counseling** is an excellent idea!
- Find out how to get married. Different locales have different marriage licensing regulations.

02 of 04

Understanding the Importance of Communication in Your Marriage

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As with any relationship—parent, teacher, boss, neighbor—clear and open communication is essential.

- Keep your lines of communication open with one another. Be sure to talk frequently and make sure you are **talking about your feelings**.
- Accept that all **marriages go through stages**. Maintaining a healthy marriage is a life long process.
- Learn about your **relationship fighting style** and how to **fight fairly**. Happily married couples don't avoid arguments. They know how to handle conflict in healthy ways.
- Avoid the main "**marriage killers**": criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling.
- Be willing to seek help through **couples' therapy** if you find yourselves starting to be defensive, critical, or distant from one another. Don't wait too long to get help! Couples who postpone seeking professional advice often find that the damage to their marriage is too extensive to save it.
- Consider using the **tool of dialogue** on a daily basis to stay emotionally connected.

03 of 04

Issues Many Married Couples Have to Work Through Together

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No marriage is perfect. While the issues may come from various sources, you must be able to work through them with your spouse or else your relationship will suffer.

- Finances are one of the biggest reasons couples divorce. **Regularly discuss money** issues in your relationship.
- Conflict over **chores** around the house is also a common conflict in a marriage. This is a topic you can't avoid talking about.
- A sexy, exciting marriage doesn't just happen. You need to stay intimate with one another and show your love and passion for one another on a daily basis.

- Although children are a tremendous joy, they do have an impact on a marriage. Your relationship will change after you bring a baby into the picture. You also do not want to develop a **child-centered marriage**.
- Realize that your in-laws will be a part of your marriage whether you like it or not. Learn how to **set boundaries** with your in-laws and how to enjoy them.
- Don't let stress in your marriage tear you apart. Learn coping skills to help you through the tough times.
- **Interfaith, interracial, and intercultural** marriages have their own set of unique challenges to face. If you are considering one of these marriage relationships, discuss your differences before you get married.
- Don't wait too long to **get help** if you find you can't resolve conflict on your own.

04 of 04

Celebrating Your Marriage Relationship

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People complain regularly about losing the spark in their relationship. Don't let that happen to you! Find ways to celebrate your marriage for years to come.

- Make time to have fun together. The word "recreation" means to re-create.
- Remember to celebrate the special days in your lives, especially your wedding anniversary! Here's your **Anniversary Gift Guide**
- Plan ahead for the **holidays** and how you will handle your in-laws' expectations.
- **Establish rituals** to keep your marriage strong.
- Every now and again, be spontaneous. Do not become complacent or think your spouse is supposed to make you happy.